



Mains Practice Question

Q. Ethics examines the criteria for judging human actions as right or wrong. What are the various sources of ethical guidance for a civil servant? (150 words)

01 Oct, 2020 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce by defining the Ethics.
- Write briefly the need for ethical behaviour for civil servants.
- Discuss various sources of ethical guidance for civil servants.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

- Ethics is a branch of philosophy that involves systematic study of human actions from the point of view of its rightfulness or wrongfulness. The term 'ethics' is derived from the ancient Greek word 'ethos', which means 'custom', 'human character' or 'disposition'.
- Ethical guidance for a civil servant is required to take decisions which are in the larger interest of the society.

Body

Need for ethical behaviour: With the current declining trust in government and democracy in general, citizens are asking for more ethical behaviours from public officials. Many organizations have identified ethics and anti-corruption as critical to a country's successful development and good governance.

Sources of Ethical guidance

- In any ethical dilemma or situation a number of parameters are found to be useful in arriving at any solutions. Among all major parameters laws, rules and regulations and conscience play a major role.
- **Laws:** In ethics, law has a moral connotation. St. Thomas Aquinas defined laws as "an ordinance of reason for the common good, promulgated by him who has care of the community."
 - Law sets up a course of action that must be followed. It induces people to act or restrains them from acting. It imposes an obligation.
 - Example - The Environment Protection Act
- **Rules and regulations:** Although law is an ordinance resulting from human reason, it is not the same as rules and regulations. Regulations often help clarify laws, although sometimes they do not achieve that objective.
 - Regulations focus on the individual good, whereas the purpose of law is to promote the common good.
 - The source of a regulation is any private authority, such as an organisation, a superior or a head of household.
 - Example: Plastic Waste Management Rules derives their legality from 'The Environment

Protection Act'.

- **Conscience:** Conscience is something within human beings that determines the morality of human actions. Conscience is a special act of the mind that comes into being when the intellect passes judgement on the goodness or badness of a particular act, it is a practical judgement on particular, concrete, human actions.
 - Conscience is a judgement-an act of intellect. It is not a feeling or an emotion, but, rather an intellectual decision it is also a decision with a view to a particular action. Conscience can make a practical judgement on morality of either a past action or an action about to occur.

Conclusion

- High ethical standards for exercise of authority by a civil servant are a prerequisite. It helps a civil servant to navigate in turbulent times.
- An Individual can take clues from laws, rules, regulations and conscience to ensure that his/her action, behaviour and conduct is based on a sound ethical framework.

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